

## DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

### *Daniel 6*

For the younger classes the introduction to today's lesson should go back to the lesson on the conquest of Judah. Then review the previous lessons on Daniel.

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#### **Doctrinal Points**

*The Lord is able to protect those who obey Him.*

*Part of the prophetic Word was given outside of the Holy Land, contrary to the belief of the Jews.*

*Faith in the Lord makes a person fearless.*

*A person who really wants to do right may make careless mistakes.*

*Innocence is a safeguard.*

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#### **Notes for Parents**

As we have noted, when Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Judah, several years before the final captivity, he had a few of the most promising young princes of the royal household of Judah brought to Babylon to be trained in the language and learning of the Chaldeans. Among these was Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar did not treat these young men as prisoners but had them cared for as members of his own household.

Daniel and three others—whose Chaldean names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were outstanding because from the very first they refused to do anything which was forbidden by the religious law in which they had been brought up before they left home. For this reason the Lord could be with them. You have read the story of how He saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were cast into the fiery furnace. To Daniel He gave the ability to interpret dreams and the gift of prophecy, and because of these powers Daniel became chief ruler in the kingdom.

Even after Babylon in its turn was conquered by Darius the Mede,

Daniel was continued in his office, and our story today is of the plot formed by his subordinate officers and its results. This is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible and it teaches us several lessons. The most important, of course, is that if we faithfully learn and obey the Lord's will, the Lord will be with us and save us from all the false and evil things which would destroy our souls. Anyone who has been tempted to do what he knew to be wrong knows what "lions" are, and we have all had some experience with being saved from them by the Lord's help.

Another lesson is very clear. Whoever tries to injure someone else is bound to injure himself instead. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

And the part of Darius in the story teaches us two more lessons. The first is that we should never make an important decision without stopping to think. And the second is that when anyone has the courage to stand firmly by his principles in the face of danger, he may lead others to acknowledge the Lord and to change their own lives for the better.



### Primary

The children should be reminded of the history and character of Daniel, with emphasis on his courage in doing what was right in the midst of temptation. Then read the story from the Word. Emphasize verses 25-28 and make the point that when we do right, other people are often led to a better state of thought and feeling.

When king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah, he at first tried to keep things there very much as they were. Although he carried off some of the treasure, he did not take most of the people away at that time. But he did have a few of the most promising young princes brought to Babylon to be trained in his own court. One of these young princes was Daniel.

You know some children are very easily persuaded by their playmates to do things they know are wrong. Daniel was not like that. He was very brave and honest, and he went right on worshipping the Lord in Babylon just as he had at home in Jerusalem. So

the Lord gave Daniel great wisdom and the ability to interpret dreams and to foretell the future. And He made him His prophet to speak words of warning to the kings of Babylon.

The Lord gave him power to interpret dreams.

Through this power he became one of the rulers in Babylon.

Do you remember someone else who rose to power in the same way?

Later, under king Darius, the princes of Babylon became jealous of Daniel.

What law did they persuade Darius to sign?

What did Daniel do?

Did the king want Daniel killed?

How did the king show his grief?

How was Daniel saved?

How did Darius punish the princes?

When we try to hurt other people, we are very likely to find that we ourselves are the ones who get hurt.



### Junior

The teacher should be familiar with the first five chapters of Daniel in order to cover the whole story of Daniel with confidence, drawing as much as possible on the memory of the pupils. The moral lessons for the Juniors are suggested in the Junior notes. Have the class look up and read the Bible references in the last paragraph of their notes.

What nation conquered Judah?

Who was the king of Babylon at that time?

Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Judah when he first conquered it. He wanted to rule over all the countries he could, but he was a wise king and would have let the people of Judah alone if they had only obeyed him and paid the tribute money he required. Jeremiah the prophet advised them to do this, but they kept rebelling and so forced Nebuchadnezzar to his final treatment of them.

We learn from Daniel 1:1-4 that at the time of his first conquest of Judah Nebuchadnezzar had several of the most promising young princes of Judah brought to Babylon to continue their education in his court. He did not treat them as captives, but made careful provision for their support and training. Four of these young men

became distinguished from the others by the fact that they refused to break the religious law in regard to food and continued faithfully in the worship of the Lord, in which they had been instructed by the priests in Jerusalem. You will find the names of these four in Daniel 1:6-7.

Because of their faithfulness the Lord was able to protect and help these four young men. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, because they would not worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up as an idol, were cast into the fiery furnace, the Lord saved them. This story is found in Daniel 3. Later Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon.

In what ways is the story of Daniel like that of Joseph?

Daniel was somewhat overlooked during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, but he came into prominence again at the end of Belshazzar's reign, when he read and interpreted the writing on the wall and prophesied Belshazzar's death and the conquest of his kingdom by the Medes and Persians. Darius the Mede, who followed Belshazzar as king, recognized Daniel's ability.

What office did Darius give Daniel?

How did the other presidents and princes feel about it?

Why could they not find any fault with Daniel?

In what way did they decide they could catch him?

What was peculiar about the laws of the Medes and Persians?

Did Daniel obey the new law?

How did the king feel about it?

How did he show his grief?

How was Daniel saved from the lions?

What became of the men who had plotted against him?

What new decree did Darius make?

This story teaches us several lessons. One is that when we try to injure others, we are very likely to injure ourselves instead. Another is that we should never let ourselves be hurried into doing something we may afterward be sorry for. "Stop and think" is a good rule. Like Darius, if we do not stop and think about the possible

consequences, we may do something foolish just because other people suggest it. Another lesson is that if we do right, the Lord can save us from the many dangers which the evils in the world create. And finally the end of the chapter teaches us that when we have the courage to do right, no matter what the people who happen to be around us want us to do, we may be the means of leading others to see what is right and do it.

The rest of the book of Daniel tells of several prophetic visions which he had. A prophet is one who speaks for the Lord. Daniel spoke for the Lord not only to the people of Babylon but to us and to people of all time. The Lord Himself tells us in Matthew 24:15 that Daniel prophesied even the conditions which would exist in the church at the time when the Lord would find it necessary to make His Second Coming. You might also read Daniel 12:4 and then Revelation 5:1. You see, Daniel was a truly great prophet as well as a great man in the eyes of the people of his own time, as the prophet Ezekiel—who was a contemporary of Daniel—shows us. Read Ezekiel 14:14.

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### Intermediate

The general correspondence of this story is simple, and the lesson is an important one for this age group. They need to be led and helped in every possible way to feel that the brave thing to do is to stand up for what is right, no matter how many arguments are advanced to persuade them to do wrong.

The ancient Hebrews did not consider the book of Daniel to be among their most sacred scriptures because Daniel received his call to be a prophet after he left Jerusalem, and the whole book was written in Babylon. They felt that only in the Holy Land could a prophet be inspired. But in Matthew 24:15 the Lord Himself calls Daniel a prophet and tells us that his prophecies even extended to the state in which the world would be at the time of the Second Coming. All the prophets were inspired by the Lord; that is, they spoke words which they knew the Lord chose. They sometimes had their ideas of what their messages meant to the people of their

own time, but they did not understand the spiritual and eternal meaning within them. Daniel himself tells us this in the last six verses of his book.

As we learn from Daniel 1:1-7, Daniel was among the first to be taken away from Jerusalem to Babylon, several years before the final captivity, and he was a very young man at the time. But, like all the children of the royal household, he had been taught by the priests. The fact that he and his three close companions were determined to be faithful to their own religion brought them several times into great danger, but each time the final result was that they were singled out for great honor. For the Lord could be with them. There is a very important lesson in this for us. We are often thrown among associates who have not been brought up in the high principles of our own church, and it may seem that we shall be unpopular and ridiculed if we do not do as they do. But if we have the courage to stand by our principles, we shall presently find that we are respected and looked upon as leaders, and our leadership will be for good instead of for evil.

Our lesson for today gives us a clear illustration of this. The throne of Babylon had finally been seized by Darius the Mede, but because Daniel had prophesied that this would happen (Daniel 5:25-31), Darius gave him the highest office in his new dominion. The law which was suggested by the jealous men who found themselves under Daniel we may think of as expressing what worldly people often say or think of a spiritual person with whom they can find no actual fault and who seems to be getting along well: "Just wait! This unworldliness or spiritual mindedness is all very well in theory, but you have to look out for yourself first or everyone else will get the better of you." The Medes represent those who are against the truths and goods of the church. Darius, when he signed the law, did not even think of Daniel. He was flattered, and signed without even stopping to think. Do we ever do things like that? It was accepted as a fact that the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed once they were signed. What we do cannot be undone. No matter how sorry we may be afterward and

no matter how we ourselves may change through repentance, the words and acts have had an effect which cannot be wiped out.

So Daniel was cast into the lions' den and the mouth of the den was sealed. Lions appear very often in the Bible story, and like everything else there they have a good and a bad correspondence. The lion is recognized as a symbol of strength and power, and power is in truth. In its highest sense the lion stands for the Lord as divine truth. He is called the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. And in its next sense it represents the power of falsity used to support the love of self. When we want very much to do something which we really know is wrong, we always try to find reasons for doing it which will seem to be true. These are the "lions" of our story. You may remember that a lion stood in the way of Samson when he went down to the Philistine country. He was able to kill it because his hair had not yet been cut, his hair representing the commandments. As long as we keep the commandments, the "lions" of false reasoning cannot hurt us.

Daniel was shut up over night in the lions' den. We have to meet our temptations ourselves. Other people may advise and try to help us—as Darius did Daniel in verse 16—but no one can make our decision for us. We have to stand alone. The night always pictures a state of mental darkness and doubt. But the morning is the dawn of a new bright state when we see things clearly as they really are. In the morning Daniel said: "My God hath sent his angel and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me." Innocence means having done no harm, and it exists when we trust in the Lord and obey Him and do not set up our own judgment instead. When we are in innocence, the Lord's power can act through and in us and "shut the lions' mouths." False reasonings will be seen as foolish and will be without any power over us.

Daniel's enemies were then destroyed by the lions. Evil always returns to the person who tries to injure another. And Darius recognized Daniel's God as the greatest God and commanded all his people to worship Him. We should try to recognize our temptations

and overcome them not only for our own sakes but because our victory will lead others to acknowledge the Lord and follow Him.

*Basic Correspondences*

the Medes = those who are against the truths  
and goods of the church

lions = the power of truth (or falsity)

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**Senior**

Try to impress the young people with the danger of thinking too well of oneself, and with the way in which pride grows and destroys all wisdom. Try also to inspire them with the desire to emulate Daniel's faithfulness, and leave them with the feeling that only a weak person allows his associates to lead him to do what he knows to be wrong.

Babylon represents the love of dominion, and it was Babylon which conquered Judah. Judah represents the heart of the person of the church. Judah carried away captive to Babylon is a picture of the heart of a person of the church which has allowed the selfish love of being first and so ruling others to take possession of it. We sometimes may say of a person that he is "carried away" by ambition. Anything or anyone who stands in his way must be destroyed. This is the nature of the love of rule.

Yet we have a familiar proverb, "Pride goeth before destruction," one of the proverbs of Solomon (16:18), and history gives us plenty of illustrations of the truth of this proverb. The book of Daniel shows us how this proverb worked itself out in the actual history of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, who conquered Judah, had some wisdom in spite of his pride. The first four chapters of Daniel show us that the king was capable of learning by experience that the Lord was after all mightier than he. But his son and successor, Belshazzar, carried his pride to the point of profaning the holy vessels from the temple of Jerusalem and as a result lost his life and his kingdom. This story is told in chapter 5. When pride leads one to think of oneself as superior to God, there comes the "writing on the wall" to show that the end is at hand.



Daniel was the prophet through whom the Lord spoke to the kings of Babylon. Like all the prophets, he represents the Word of God. Ezekiel, who was his contemporary and also one of the captives from Judah, was the prophet who spoke to the people in Babylon. But both actually spoke to all men of all times. What we have learned of the Word remains with us to speak to our minds, however far we have gone astray in the paths of selfishness.

Daniel, we remember, had attained high position in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar because his absolute faithfulness to the Lord had enabled the Lord to give him the ability to interpret dreams and to prophesy. Belshazzar apparently ignored Daniel until he needed someone to interpret the writing on the wall; but Darius the Mede, who took over Belshazzar's kingdom, restored Daniel to the position of first ruler under him. Selfish people often see-saw back and forth in this way between complete disregard of religion and the desire to make use of its obvious power.

Apparently it did not occur to Darius that Daniel would refuse to obey any law he chose to make. So he found himself in a position where he had to choose between giving up the wisest of his counsellors and giving up his pride. Daniel had to be thrown to the lions. This is just the kind of trouble into which pride and self-will bring us. We reach the point at which we will give up what we know to be the wise and right course rather than acknowledge that we have been capable of making a mistake.

Lions are symbols of power—in a good sense the power of truth and in a bad sense the power of falsity. When we allow ourselves to be led by false counsellors and by our own pride into the idea that the Word is to be judged like any other book as a product of human intelligence, we are “throwing Daniel into the den of lions.”

But it was not Daniel who was killed. In a way this story is a summary of the history of the treatment of the Bible by the Christian Church. It was at first recognized and set up as ruler, but from the beginning many men in many ways have tried to destroy it, and as a result these men have lost their spiritual lives, while the Bible still stands unscathed. We should recognize from this fact, if

from no other consideration, that it is the Word of God. If doubts come into our minds because of arguments advanced by humanists, we may think of them as the darkness of the night during which Daniel was shut up in the den, and we may know that in the morning our doubts will be dispelled.

“My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lion’s mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me.” If we are faithful through this temptation to be deceived by specious reasonings, as Daniel was faithful, recognizing our own weakness and sinfulness and looking to the Lord for guidance and strength—which is to be innocent—the false reasonings which seem so strong in the world around us will have no power to hurt or even to disturb us.

The outstanding lesson of the book of Daniel is the effect of Daniel’s courageous faithfulness to the Lord upon everyone around him. Daniel made his choice when he was first brought to Babylon as a very young man and stuck to it through every danger and temptation. If we could all, when we are young, realize that the truly brave person is humble before the Lord and stands through thick and thin by what the Lord teaches him is right, we should avoid many pitfalls and reverses and become leaders in bringing about the Lord’s kingdom on earth.

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### Adult

The application of this familiar story to the predicament of many Christians in our modern times will perhaps be the best discussion topic, although some of the lessons suggested in the notes for the younger classes may also be useful. Try to call attention to the points brought out in the last paragraph of the Adult notes. Many people have not noticed the important statements in chapter 12.

The story of Daniel exemplifies the power of obedience to the Word to give wisdom, security, and strength to the individual life. Because of Daniel’s absolute faithfulness to the Lord, the Lord could be with him and could speak through him, and for the same reason Daniel came to be recognized as the wisest and most upright

man in the kingdom and retained his high place throughout his life, in spite of many efforts by his enemies to overthrow him. In all this his story parallels that of Joseph.

The story of Daniel in the lions' den is one of the most familiar of the Bible stories. It has a strong appeal for children and young people because of its dramatic quality, and it is well that this is so. For children and young people need to be inspired to stand on their own feet morally and spiritually from the start and not to let themselves be led into wrongdoing by their companions. Children need to learn to recognize and resist temptation on their own level all through their period of physical growth or they develop no independent strength of principle. And the effect of their faithfulness to their principles on other children and young people less fortunate in their training is a point to be taken into account. This, too, the story of Daniel illustrates.

But our chapter has a deeper meaning which is important for us all in these modern times. The love of dominion, which Babylon represents, had actually, under Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, reached the point at which the holy things of worship were completely profaned by being used to minister to Belshazzar's glory (chapter 5) and Darius the Mede had taken over the kingdom. "Babylon"—whether we think of it as a particular church or as an evil love in general or in the man of any church—seeks to attain its goals by using the things of religion. But as it progresses, there comes a point at which all actual belief in religion is destroyed. Swedenborg tells us that the Medes represent those who are against the truths and goods of the church.

Darius put Daniel at the head of his counsellors because Daniel had predicted that Babylon would fall into his hands. He recognized that Daniel was wiser than his other counsellors and wanted to keep his services, but he had no understanding of the source of Daniel's wisdom. Daniel, like all the prophets, represents the Word. There are many in the world today who recognize that there is great wisdom in the Word but attribute that wisdom to men and think they can use it to further their own ambitions. They are the

“humanists” who think of God as the sum total of men’s virtues and achievements. This position is directly “against the truths and goods of the church.”

The Word, however, refuses to be fitted into this humanistic scheme of things. Sooner or later these people find themselves faced with the necessity of giving up their pride in their own superior intelligence or giving up the use of the Word for their service, and the Word is rejected altogether. Daniel is sealed up in the den of lions.

Lions in a good sense represent the power of truth, in a bad sense the power of falsity. Daniel remains shut up in their den all night. Because of the treatment the Word has received at the hands of those who wish to exalt human intelligence, many good people today are in darkness and doubt as to its source and credibility. But sooner or later the morning dawns. Very early in the morning, when the king went to the den to learn Daniel’s fate, Daniel said, “My God hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me.” With whatever falsities men seek to destroy the Word, it stands perennially secure. In our morning state we see this. “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them,” as the 119th Psalm tells us. And the peace we have through our trust in the Word has its effect even upon those who have not regarded the Word as holy. Read verses 25 to 28 of our chapter.

In Matthew 24:15 the Lord Himself tells us that Daniel’s prophecies even treated of the time of the Last Judgment and the Second Coming. The five chapters which follow chapter 6 contain prophetic visions which the Lord gave to Daniel to record. These visions treat of the whole history of the first Christian Church. And we should read chapter 12, the final chapter of the book, especially for its connection with chapter 5 of the book of Revelation, which is probably familiar to all of us in the New Church. Even in the letter it gives us a clear statement of the relation of a prophet to his prophecy which is very helpful in our thought about the nature of the Word.

### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*True Christian Religion*, n. 754: “The church is consummated by various means, especially by such things as cause falsity to appear as truth; and when falsity appears to be truth, good that is essentially good, such as is called spiritual good, is no longer possible. The good that is then believed to be good is merely natural good, such as is brought forth by a moral life. The chief cause of the consummation of truth and of good along with it, is the two natural loves that are diametrically opposed to the two spiritual loves, and that are called the love of self and the love of the world. Love of self when it is predominant is the opposite of love to God, and love of the world when it is predominant is the opposite of love to the neighbor. Love of self is a wishing well to oneself alone, and not to any other except for the sake of self; and the same is true of love of the world; and these loves when they are fostered spread like gangrene through the body, gradually destroying every part of it. That such love has invaded the churches is manifest from Babylon and the way it is described (Gen. 11:1-9; Isa. 13, 14, 47; Jer. 1; Dan. 2:31-47, 3:1-7, seq., 6:8-28, 7:1-14; and Apoc. 17 and 18 from beginning to end of both).”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Who was Daniel? *a young prince who became a prophet*
- J. Why was he first brought to Babylon? *to be educated*
- P. What made him a great man? *his faith in God*
- J. What other nation finally conquered Babylon? *Persia*
- P. Who was its king? *Darius*
- P. What office did he give Daniel? *ruler of land*
- J. Who plotted against Daniel? *other political leaders*
- J. What law did they persuade Darius to sign? *no prayer for thirty days*
- P. What did Daniel do? *prayed as usual*
- P. Did the king want to lose Daniel? *no*
- J. Why could he not change the law? *unchangeable*
- P. How long was Daniel shut up in the lions' den? *all night*
- P. How was he saved? *angel*
- P. What happened to his enemies? *thrown to lions*
- J. What new law did Darius make? *everyone worship Daniel's God*
- I. What do all the prophets represent? *the Word of God*
- S. What does a lion represent in a good and in a bad sense? *power of truth, power of falsity*